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RR RUEHBZ RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN  
DE RUEH DU #0028 0651557  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 061557Z MAR 09  
FM AMCONSUL DURBAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1415  
INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 0788

UNCLAS DURBAN 000028

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: IFP MAKES A CLEAN SWEEP IN KWAZULU NATAL BY-ELECTIONS

1.(U) Summary: Following its sweep of by-elections in KwaZulu Natal, Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) National Chairperson Ms. Zanele Magwaza Msibi expressed confidence that the IFP will reclaim the province of KwaZulu Natal from the African National Congress (ANC) in the April 22 general elections. The IFP's decisive defeat of its biggest rival, the ANC, is a big boost to its general election campaign. End summary.

IFP Still in Control, ANC Defeated

12. (U) The IFP won all three March 4 by-elections held in areas of KwaZulu Natal considered to be the party's strongholds, including Jozini, Hlabisa and Mandeni. The IFP also won a ward previously controlled by the ANC in the Mbabazane local municipality. In a statement issued by the IFP in reaction to the results, KZN Premier Candidate and National Chairperson Ms. Zanele Magwaza-Msibi said 'if you wanted an indication of the mood in the ground in the run-up to the general election, you got it.' She also said, 'the wave is turning our way.'

13. (U) Ms. Magwaza-Msibi expressed confidence that by-election results are proof that IFP's support is growing ahead of the general election. She said the IFP defeated the ANC in Mbabazane despite intense campaigning by Premier Sibusiso Ndebele in the area. Ms. Magwaza-Msibi further said 'the ANC went out in full force, armed with government sponsored food parcels.'

14. (U) ANC Spokesperson Ms. Nomfundo Mcetshwa told Pol/Econ Assistant that the ANC is disappointed at the results, especially the loss of its ward in Mbabazane. She said the party's provincial election committee will look into what went wrong in Mbabazane and other areas. However, Ms. Mcetshwa was quick to point out that the ANC remain confident of winning about 60 percent of the provincial vote in the April 22 general election.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: IFP's clean sweep of the recent by-elections gives the party a much needed boost in its attempt to reclaim the province from the ANC. The ANC had expected to do well, after deploying senior leaders and taking advantage of the current election campaigning momentum. But the ANC failed to make substantial inroads in rural areas, which have long been considered to be IFP strongholds. Failure by the ANC to retain its ward in Mbabazane is a serious blow and shows that the IFP is still a force in KZN and that forthcoming national elections may not be as easy as the ANC in KZN seems to think.

DERDERIAN